

Blind Love

By

Wilkie Collins

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PREFACE

IN the month of August 1889, and in the middle of the seaside holiday, a message came to me from Wilkie Collins, then, though we hoped otherwise, on his death-bed.

It was conveyed to me by Mr. A. P. Watt. He told me that his son had just come from Wilkie Collins: that they had been speaking of his novel, "Blind Love," then running in the Illustrated London News: that the novel was, unfortunately, unfinished: that he himself could not possibly finish it: and that he would be very glad, if I would finish it if I could find the time. And that if I could undertake this work he would send me his notes of the remainder. Wilkie Collins added these words: "If he has the time I think he will do it: we are both old hands at this work, and understand it, and he knows that I would do the same for him if he were in my place."

Under the circumstances of the case, it was impossible to decline this request. I wrote to say that time should be made, and the notes were forwarded to me at Robin Hood's Bay. I began by reading carefully and twice over, so as to get a grip of the story and the novelist's intention, the part that had already appeared, and the proofs so far as the author had gone. I then turned to the notes. I found that these were not merely notes such as I expected--simple indications of the plot and the development of events, but an actual detailed scenario, in which every incident, however trivial, was carefully laid down: there were also fragments of dialogue inserted at those places where dialogue was wanted to emphasise the situation and make it real. I was much struck with the writer's perception of the vast importance of dialogue in making the reader seize the scene. Description requires attention: dialogue rivets attention.

It is not an easy task, nor is it pleasant, to carry on another man's work: but the possession of this scenario lightened the work enormously. I have been careful to adhere faithfully and exactly to the plot, scene by scene, down to the smallest detail as it was laid down by the author in this book. I have altered nothing. I have preserved and incorporated every fragment of dialogue. I have used the very language wherever that was written so carefully as to show that it was meant to be used. I think that there is only one trivial detail where I had to choose because it was not clear from the notes what the author had intended. The plot of the novel, every scene, every situation, from beginning to end, is the work of Wilkie Collins. The actual writing is entirely his up to a certain point: from that point to the end

it is partly his, but mainly mine. Where his writing ends and mine begins, I need not point out. The practised critic will, no doubt, at once lay his finger on the spot.

I have therefore carried out the author's wishes to the best of my ability. I would that he were living still, if only to regret that he had not been allowed to finish his last work with his own hand!

WALTER BESANT.